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WATER QUALITY

Hazardous Waste

A clean environment begins in your home.

Natural Resources Conservation Service • Hawaii

What are hazardous wastes in our home?

We all use a variety of household products which are hazardous. Many cleaning products, solvents, and pesticides contain moderately to highly toxic chemicals which can be a threat to our health and environment. The disposal of these hazardous wastes in our backyards, septic systems, or landfills is an issue of growing concern. What happens to the potentially dangerous chemicals we put out with our garbage? How can we minimize their effect on our health and our environment? This fact sheet will answer these important questions and many others.



What are improper disposal practices?

1. Down the Drain or Into Stormdrains

After being disposed of down the drain or toilet, these substances enter your septic system. Hazardous waste can corrode plumbing or collect in the trap and release fumes through the drains. These substances can also damage or destroy your system's ability to properly treat human waste. Once in the groundwater, household hazardous waste could contaminate your well.

Even if your area is sewered, most wastewater treatment plants are not designed to treat all hazardous substances. As a result, they will end up in surface water bodies, or in sewage sludge which will be sent to landfills or spread as fertilizer.

2. On the Ground

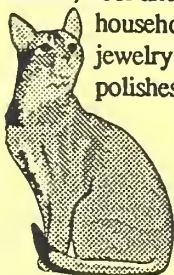
Pouring these substances on the ground is not a safe disposal method. Many of these substances interact with soil particles in unknown ways. In many cases, the soil does not act as a buffer; anything poured on the ground can end up in the groundwater.

3. In the Landfill

Most landfills are not designed to accept hazardous materials. Once disposed of in a landfill, these materials can take years to decompose. As water from rainfall infiltrates through the landfill, it can become contaminated by these hazardous products. The water will carry these contaminants through the soil and may eventually enter the groundwater system or a surface water body.

What are sources of hazardous waste?

Antifreeze, asphalt and roofing tar, automatic transmission fluid, batteries/battery acid, car wash detergents, car waxes and polishes, cesspool cleaners, degreasers, diesel fuel, disinfectants, drain cleaners, engine and radiator flushes, floor and furniture strippers, fungicides, gasoline, grease/lubes, household/oven cleaners, hydraulic fluid (brake fluid), insecticides, jewelry cleaners, kerosene, laundry soil and stain removers, metal polishes, motor oils, and waste oils, no-pest strips, paint brush cleaners, varnishes, stains, dyes, pet flea collars, refrigerants, rust proofers, spot removers/dry clean fluid, swimming pool chemicals, toilet cleaners, weed killers, and wood preservatives.



How does it affect our



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Over 95% of Oahu's population depends on groundwater for its drinking water. This valuable resource is also very vulnerable; it is susceptible to contamination from a variety of land use practices.

There are no state or federal regulations governing the disposal of household hazardous wastes. There are some regulations barring the disposal of materials down storm drain, and recommendations against disposal in the sanitary sewer and landfills. *However, the proper disposal of household hazardous materials will help protect your drinking water from contamination.*

What are proper disposal practices?

As a member of a household, you play a critical role in reducing the amount of hazardous wastes generated and disposing of wastes properly. You can begin by understanding that the solid waste you dispose of does include hazardous waste and that these materials represent a potential contamination source to groundwater and surface water supplies. The quality of our water supplies is directly effected by how we dispose of and manage our wastes.

- Use the product only as indicated on the label.
- Learn to recognize which household items are hazardous.
- Buy only what you can use and need.
- Use only what you need. In this case, more is not better.
- Before you buy a product containing a hazardous substance, ask yourself if you really need it or if you could use some less hazardous substance to serve the same purpose.
- Donate leftover or unused products like paint to someone who can use them. Neighbors, community and religious organizations, and schools may accept unused household products.
- If available, follow label directions for disposal. If the directions are unclear, you can call the Department of Health, Solid and Hazardous Waste Branch at 586-4226.
- Participate in Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days. The Hawaii Department of Health sponsors collection days where citizens can bring their hazardous wastes to locations for disposal at no charge. For information on collection days or disposal of household hazardous waste, call 586-4226.
- Recycle wastes whenever possible. Used motor oil and batteries can be recycled. On Oahu you can dial RECYCLE for recycling information.
- Consider non-toxic alternatives. The Hawaii Cooperative Extension Service has suggestions for non-toxic alternatives for household cleaners, aerosol sprays, and automotive and paint products. You can receive this information by calling 956-4122.





What is hazardous waste?

What is a hazardous waste?

A substance is considered hazardous if it is corrosive, explosive, flammable, or if it contains toxic chemicals or any other potentially harmful materials. Unlike most hazardous wastes which are byproducts of industrial and commercial operations, many household products contain only small amounts of toxic substances. Although they may be disposed of in small amounts, these hazardous materials can have significant cumulative effects on our environment.

Motor oil, pesticides, discarded paint cans, mothballs, flea collars, medicine, and household cleaners may seem like everyday items, but are examples of household hazardous waste. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the average household in the U.S. disposes of one pound of such hazardous waste each year.

Water Facts

- Taking your used motor oil to an oil recycling center is better for our water than dumping the oil down a storm drain.
- We generate almost 2 billion pounds of hazardous waste each year in our homes from household cleansers and chemicals.
- Americans use nearly 1.3 billion gallons of motor oil, but less than one-half is reprocessed by recyclers. Motor oil, poured down sewer drains or on the ground, can contaminate water.

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